

Letter from Eliza Symonds Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, undated, with transcript

Thursday Night. My dear Aleck,

I promised that another letter should follow that which was posted this afternoon, with as little delay as possible, and with all the news I can muster. First of all about your eyes. Have you cold water as directed in a former letter? Marie says you were suffering very much when you wrote to her. You are growing so rapidly, that there is much danger of your outgrowing your strengths. I wish you could be prevailed on to try a little good bitter beer. I am certain that taking a glass of ale daily, is the main cause why I am so much stronger. You might explain our wishes in this respect to Mr. Skinner— and if you dislike to take beer before the boys you might take it in private. If you do take beer, keep clear of preserves, fruit and pickles, because these in a stomach like yours would disagree. Let us know more particularly about your health. I need not give you any of Maggie's news— as I understand she has just written to you. Uncle David looks as jolly as ever, and Aunt quite young and blooming. I suppose you remember Mr. and Mrs. LeFray? The latter is Aunt Ellen's Sister. When we were last in Dublin, he held some situation in a news paper office, and at that time was ignorant of one syllable either of Greek or Latin. At the age of 22 he began to study these languages— with a view to entering the Church— and has studied to such good purpose that he has recently been appointed to one of the best Churches in Liverpool. He is to have 400 pounds the first year, 2 500 pounds the second, 600 pounds the third, and so on. You see what can be done through diligence and perseverance. Mr. Fray has done all this whilst carrying on his former employment. So please God that you have health and strength there is no reason why you and Melly should not easily obtain degrees. We are expecting Miss Davies, from Dover, to spend two or three days with us. Louisa is quite well and Edward attends to her lessons. He is manifesting a very decided talent for drawing.

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We had a letter yesterday morning from Melly, who is quite well. In about six weeks or so, I shall be thinking of going to Edinburgh, and will be glad now when Melly and grandma are comfortably settled. I fear poor grandma has had a hard winter. She is looking forward with great spirit to the change. Are you aware that Mr. Naumam was quite right and well when Papa was in that quarter. He saw Mr. N. in the Asylum, where I believe he still is. Papa told me how stout Mr. Naumam had grown! So much so that I should not know him, Papa said. He did not see Mrs. naumam. We have not heard anything very lately from Hamilton Place, but I believe they are all well. Mrs. MacMillan is in Ireland, she has a situation School. There are upwards of a hundred boys and 18 servants. When you come home again, bring me two or three slips of that deep red rose tree which I sent to Mr. Skinner. Don't forget. I had one but Perd destroyed it, as well as almost every other plant in the garden. We are taking measures now to keep him out of it, and have begun 3 again with a fresh stock of plants. At the same time adopting all and hitherto unheard of expedients to keep them out of his reach. Just now the garden looks very nice. The Laburnam and French May trees are half in leaf, and wall flowers as well as other early flowers, have been in blossom for some time.

(Friday Morning)

We this day received your little penciled note which you may be sure has tended to make Papa and me feel very uneasy and anxious about you; but we are nevertheless glad to know the true state of the case. If we were in Edinburgh, either Papa or I would at once go to Elgin and see you, but as it is, that would hardly be practicable. I shall write to Melly however and ask him to run up to Elgin during the preachings— which I believe take place in a fortnight. You must by this time, my dear boy, be sensible of the wisdom of your Father's advice— and the folly of voluntarily placing yourself at such a distance from your family without one solitary advantage to be gained by it. But on the contrary, a positive loss to your better interests. You had better re-consider your decision for next year. Papa says it is unnecessary for him to respect what he so earnestly advised you to do, before

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he yielded to your own strong wishes. I have for some time been quite prepared to hear that you were laid up either with brain fever, or nervous fever, for it is impossible to fulfil the duties of two or three Masters at once— without injury to yourself. From your 4 spirits being so much affected, I fear there must be some faulty action of the liver. I am going to put a plain question to you— Have you any cause for uneasiness of mind, beyond what we know of? If so, do not hesitate to confide in your parents. I should hope that if Dr. ?hyte thinks there is any fear of serious illness— he would advise your coming home at once. Edward you know is free to take your duties, except the Music.

I once was ill with billious, nervous fever, and was confined to bed for four months- never expecting to get up again, thanks to the drugging Doctors. I sent you a bottle of medicine intended for the express purpose of acting on the nervous system. Have you taken any of it? I sent it merely for sleeplessness; but for general disturbance of the system— it should be taken every two hours. Papa and I advise you to give up every thing but your own proper duties, and you will soon be reaching Music, and singing. Is one of the most irritating branches of tuition that can be, and enough of itself to produce nervousness. My poor dear boy, I shall be on thorns till we hear better accounts. What would I not give if I could only get at you. You must keep up your spirits in the hope that Melly will be able to pay you a visit. He is very negligent in letter writing but he has a warm heart, and I am sure will grieve to know you are so poorly. With fondest love, in which Papa and Ted unite, I am my dear Aleck,

Your ever affectionate Mothers, Eliza G. Bell.,

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P.S. Mr. Gray has lost his Father within the last month, and is left independent for life!! I am sure you will be glad to know this. Mr. Gray is to have the fourth part of 35,000 Pounds all of which the old man made himself?